

Steal This Hook!

A Place to Call Home

By Robert Wiese



Some creatures, like most people, need a place to call home, a place safe from the predations of adventurers. But sometimes, home is not so stable after all. Natural disasters and monster incursions can make home a place to defend rather than a place where one is protected.

Flowing Fire -- *Eberron*

In the Mror Holds, the dwarven clans build mountain strongholds and underground cities around their mines. The dwarves are divided into clans, and each clan claims an area of the Holds as its own. Within a dwarven city or fortress, life falls very much along a dwarven mold, even though there are non-dwarves living in the lands too.



The southern part of the Ironroot Mountains is alive with volcanic activity, though the only active volcano is the Fist of Onatar. This area is controlled by Clan Soldarak, a wealthy but greedy and power-hungry clan. All dwarves view the Fist as a sacred place and a great source of magical power, and Soldarak is fortunate to have some control over it. (While the *Eberron Campaign Setting* says that Clan Mroranon controls it, the *Eberron Player's Guide* places it in the hold of Clan Soldarak.)

Part of the defense of this area is a network of fortresses and dwarven mining cities that surround it and control access to the mountain peak itself. In one of these cities, Vonmalk, on the northern side of the Fist and partially underground, the dwarves go about their business of mining... until the day someone reports red magma seeping out from around the foundation of one of the taverns. Patrons fled the tavern as its floor was slowly covered in flowing magma. The dwarves soon found the crack in the earth through which the magma came and filled it with rock, but magma has now begun to flow through other parts of the city. So far, the dwarves have kept ahead of the incidents, but eventually they'll be unable to stop the destruction of their city.

Though the magma is behaving "naturally," and such losses are not unheard-of near the Fist of Onatar, there is one who thinks (or perhaps hopes desperately) that there is some evil force behind the destruction. The lord of Vonmalk, Morrid Soldarak, sees a pattern in the apparently chaotic destruction, and seeks out adventurers to brave the depths and find out if he is right. In exchange for help, he is willing to offer gold, or--better yet--access to dwarven smiths for the production of rare arms and armors.

d100 Motivations

01-40 Lord Morrid Soldarak is aboveboard with the adventurers, because he genuinely believes others may be convinced as well about an evil force.

41-65 Morrid Soldarak is allied with the creatures who are causing the destruction. He has been promised great personal and magical power in exchange for sacrificing his whole city to one of the dark demonic powers behind a Cult of the Dragon Below. The adventurers are a bonus sacrifice to ensure his immortality (the cult has stipulated "outside heroes" as part of its bargain).

66-00 Many in the city see the fall of Vonmalk as imminent. They oppose the wasting of time involved with waiting for adventurers to return (or not). These people interfere with the adventurers' efforts and with Lord Morrid Soldarak, and urge immediate abandonment of the city before any lives are lost. As an option, one or more of these people could secretly be allied with the Cult of the Dragon Below. This person's motivation is to drive off the dwarves so that the Cult can claim the wealth of the nearby mines.

d100 Complications

01-55 The lava is being directed by salamanders and fire elementals toward Vonmalk. They are being controlled by a fiery demon of great power trapped in Khyber. Vonmalk is directly above its prison, and the destruction of the city would open a way for the demon to be freed.

56-65 A powerful efreeti noble wants to use the city to bury access to the prison of a demon that the efreeti imprisoned back in the Age of Demons. The efreeti is directing fire elementals, magma elementals, and even redspawn firebelchers (see *Monster Manual IV*) to divert the flow of lava toward the city.

66-90 The lava is not the only danger facing the brave heroes. The lava is coming from Khyber, and a lot of things live down there. The adventurers face dangers from purple worms to ropers to deep dragons--some of which may be fleeing up into the city away from the lava.

91-00 Drow living beneath the dwarves want to destroy the city and take control of the mine, in order to enhance their own power within the drow world. They are using powerful creation magic and bound elementals to wreak their chaos.

The Cursed Vale -- *Forgotten Realms*

Stories abound regarding the Vale of Mysar, otherwise known in Asbravn as the Cursed Valley. The Vale of Mysar, named for the first person to find it, is a hidden valley several miles long in the Far Hills. The valley is fertile and temperate, and supports lush grasses, trees, and a variety of animals (and even a few things classified as monsters). It is ideal farmland, with many

Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. You'll want to use *Races of Stone* for the dwarven aspects and the mountain dangers. *Underdark* could be useful for the adventure setting itself, and *Fiendish Codex I* could help with any demons you introduce. The *Player's Guide to Eberron* gives good information about the Mror Holds, but you'll also need the *Eberron Campaign Setting*.

Forgotten Realms: The most likely place for this adventure is in the Silver Marches or Sword Coast North areas, in the mountains near the Spine of the World.

Generic: The basic requirement for this adventure is a range of volcanic mountains with connections to the Underdark in your campaign world. Ideally, the dwarven city would be somewhat isolated, but connected enough to a dwarven nation of some kind that the danger could be communicated and help could arrive.

d20 Modern: This adventure could be interesting in Hawaii or anywhere in the Pacific Ring of Fire, as long as you dump the mining aspect and create some other commodity that the dwarves are controlling. The events of this adventure could presage the eruption of a large volcano like Mt. Saint Helens or even Mt. Rainier and the destruction of Seattle.



farmers relocating to the valley when it was discovered during the time of Netheril. Yet none of them lived to tell the tale. Soon after they arrived, a great storm came over the valley and killed almost everyone. The few that escaped on foot described creatures of lightning coming down from the sky and ghostly riders on ghostly dinosaurs trampling anything that moved during the terrible storm.



There is still great interest in settling the valley, and over the centuries since, farmers have tried to reclaim it. However, something always either drives them out or outright kills them. Some go mad from whispered voices, some reach Asbravn speaking of lightning creatures and ghosts, and some don't return at all. No one has ever found a body in the valley, so the fate of any would-be settler is as much a mystery as why the Vale of Mysar refuses to be settled.

Brista Mylane, a resident of Berdusk, seeks out brave heroes because her foolish brother, Bevlis Mylane, decided to attempt the Vale of Mysar against the wishes of his family. He thought he could break the curse, but he has not returned either. Given the Cursed Valley's reputation, Brista is worried and wants someone to go find her brother. She doesn't have much to offer, but suggests that the monsters of the valley could be quite "valuable" if some were captured or harvested and sold in Asbravn.

d100 Motivations

01-50 Brista is honest about her desires to find her brother... but her cousins don't want the brother found because they would then gain his inheritance. They work to stop the heroes from finding Bevlis and restoring him to life.

51-85 There are rumors of gold and lost treasure in the Vale of Mysar, which is what Brista is really interested in. That's also what her brother was interested in, but he never even made it to the valley--he was killed by a Zhent raiding party.

86-00 Brista insists on accompanying the adventurers. She enspelled her brother to go to the Vale and grow some ingredients for a potion she is making; the ingredients must be harvested in a cursed location. She doesn't plan for the adventurers to leave the Vale alive.

d100 Complications

01-45 The Vale of Mysar is the subject of an ancient curse from the days before Netheril. The Vale was discovered even earlier, but the first settlers squabbled and fought constantly. Finally, violence erupted and several of them were killed. One of these, a

Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. To make the magic of the curse (if there is one) different from what the adventurers normally deal with, and thus make the adventure even more interesting, you might use *Magic of Incarnum* or *Tome of Magic*, both of which introduce brand new magic systems.

Eberron: Given the possible existence of dinosaurs, this adventure could be set in the Talenta Plains, or the southern Ironroot Mountains on the Talenta Plains side, or even the Endworld Mountains near the Blade Desert.

Generic: Because the valley for this adventure doesn't have to be hidden, you can set this adventure almost anywhere near enough to civilization that people would want to settle it.

retired priest, spat out a curse that has held to this day, powered by the magic of some ancient deity. Until the curse is broken, no one can settle the valley.

46-55 The curse on the valley called forth the dead that had been buried from even more ancient times. These dead rise as ghosts and specters to drive out any living creatures in the Vale, or to drive them mad. These apparitions ride ghostly dinosaurs.

56-70 The curse on the valley is nothing more than horrible weather that strikes the valley daily. People who saw electrical elementals imagined them in the danger from the real weather. The ghosts were merely figments of the imagination. However, there is a lich that lives in a tomb at the far end of the valley that uses the weather and its magic to keep everyone out of the valley.

71-00 The Vale is home to a lost tribe of reclusive saurials (or other rare humanoid race such as catfolk) that ride dinosaurs and has remained undetected so far. They created the idea of the curse to be left alone.

Alternate Rewards

Gold is not the only reason to adventure. Here are some ideas for alternative rewards:

- Should the heroes discover the root of the curse and be able to lift it, they could claim (or be rewarded with) a large tract of fertile land in this valley to use for a fortress or other kind of base.
- Ghostly dinosaurs don't lay eggs, but real ones do. Should there be real dinosaurs in the valley, the adventurers could collect eggs and raise their own dinosaur mounts.
- The air, grass or dirt from a cursed valley could be a spell component for some new spell that one of the adventurers is researching, or to a rare spell that they find in another adventure.

The Soul Stealer -- *Forgotten Realms*

In the south of Faerun, further than even the Shaar, lies the nation of Dambrath. A little north and west of there is a tract of ground called the Swagdar, which lies between Dambrath, Halrua, and Lapaliiya. This rugged place is ringed by forests and mountains that are home to different kinds of trolls, among other dangerous monsters. Travelers pass through this area frequently, and brave both bandits from the Forest of Amtar and trolls (as well as manticores and dragons) from the North Wall, the Wyrmbones, and the Channathwood.



Adventurers traveling through this area on their way to Dambrath, Luiren, or wherever, will see a somewhat large group of trolls rushing toward them from the forest west of Rethmar. The trolls rush past them without even stopping to attack, seeming too worried or fearful. Later, a few mountain trolls pass in a great hurry, also going in the direction of the Forest of Amtar. Other people they pass on the road share similar stories, of trolls and other monsters moving eastward toward the Forest of Amtar.

d20 Modern: Cursed valleys go very well in Scotland and Wales, and fey creatures would make excellent replacements for electrical elementals and ghostly dinosaurs.

In Rethmar (or Channathgate), the adventurers will then hear of an apparent attack on the town. Some mountain trolls and cave trolls rushed the walls and battered at them for a bit, but then turned and fled eastward. No one was killed, including none of the trolls. Nonetheless, a group of merchants that make Rethmar their base are worried, and would like to find some stalwart souls to go westward and find out what is scaring the creatures out of the mountains and forests. They are willing to offer great wealth to those brave heroes that can prevent an even bigger disaster from befalling their town (and businesses). One of them, rather than offering wealth, offers an old map that his family acquired in a card game a few years ago. He has not had the time or the inclination to follow it.

d100 Motivations

01-60 The merchants want the adventurers to root out the problem, and hopefully get the monsters to go back home. The status quo serves them very well.

61-90 The merchants, or some of them anyway, seek to use this new, unknown factor to their advantage, and would rather just find out what it is. Then they can work on how to control it, or at least manipulate it into doing what they want.

91-00 This matter has come to the attention of Those Who Harp, and they are concerned that a powerful demon is loose in the region. If the adventurers have any Harper-leaning inclinations, a Harper agent talks to them about looking into the matter. If they don't, the Harper agent manipulates them into investigating anyway by mentioning the innocents that are in danger.

d100 Complications

01-50 A death giant has migrated from Anauroch into the mountains in this region, and has been killing off the trolls. The trolls are afraid of the giant's ability to kill them with its aura despite their healing capabilities, and because of its ability to steal souls.

51-65 A powerful demon with the ability to steal souls and inhabit (possess) bodies was banished into the mountains of this region by a powerful wizard, and has learned how to use the local monsters to increase its own dominion. It hopes to gain enough power to exact revenge on the wizard and return to the Abyss.

66-80 The mountain trolls find themselves in a difficult situation, and could be persuaded to become temporary allies of the adventurers. Knowing which trolls to attack and which to ally with could make the adventure more than a kill-fest.

81-00 The soul stealer (giant or demon) has allied with a powerful dragon from the region. In return for treasure, the dragon harries fleeing monsters and drives creatures toward the soul stealer.

Campaign Adaptation

Races of Stone or *Races of the Wild* could be very useful for fleshing out the forest and mountain sections, and you'll want *Monster Manual III* for the different kinds of trolls. You'll find some mountain troll miniatures in the *War of the Dragon Queen* set, the newest to be released.

Eberron: Mountain trolls live primarily in the mountains around the Eldeen Reaches, so if you want to include them in the adventure you should probably set it there. The Shadowcraggs work better, though it would be more reasonable to find the adventurers in Droaam or the Eldeen Reaches near Greenheart.

Generic: Basically, some mountains and forests together are the minimum requirements, with scattered frontier towns that can be threatened by huge trolls. Set this in an area of your campaign world far from the large metropolitan centers.

d20 Modern: This adventure would work best in a future setting on some other planet where trolls are more common.

Robert Wiese entered the gaming hobby through the Boy Scouts and progressed from green recruit to head of the most powerful gaming fan organization in the world. He served as head of the RPGA Network for almost seven years, overseeing the creation of the **Living Greyhawk** and **Living Force** campaigns, among other achievements. Eventually, he returned to private life in Reno, Nevada, where he spends as much time as possible with his wife, new son Owen, and many pets.

He is still involved in writing, organizing conventions, and playing, and he models proteins for the Biochemistry Department of the University of Nevada, Reno.

©1995-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Based on the original **Dungeons & Dragons®** game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison. **D&D**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, and **Forgotten Realms** are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This material is protected under the laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction of or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. This Wizards of the Coast game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 System License, please visit **www.wizards.com/d20**. ©2001-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. Made in the U.S.A.

Visit our website at www.wizards.com/dnd